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ABSTRACT

Research has suggested significant relationships between satisfaction with life, successful aging, subjective well-being, and satisfaction with personal leisure. Vitality is used to imply high levels of energy and hope, personal growth, involvement with life, meeting change with eagerness or equanimity, positive self-regard, and an ability to cope despite possible health problems or personal losses. The purpose of this research is to better understand the values that enhance the lives of active older adults and to reduce barriers that affect their participation in leisure. Thirty active men and women aged 62 to 88 who used senior recreation centers in Columbus, Ohio, were interviewed regarding how leisure contributed to the quality of their lives. The Personal Orientation Dimensions (POD) (Knapp and Shostrum) inventory was used. Subjects were divided into five groups and the two groups with the highest and lowest vitality levels were analyzed. Results are discussed. Summaries of childhood, midlife, and current leisure activities of the subjects are presented. (MT)

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LEISURE AND VITALITY IN LATER LIFE

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LEISURE AND VITALITY IN LATER LIFE

BACKGROUND:

Last summer from May through mid-August I set out to study in the field what other researchers and theorists suggest is significant about the leisure experience--that leisure when self-motivated and personally valued can contribute in important ways to the quality of our lives. My particular interest was in uncovering the links older people, men and women past the age of 60 saw between the leisure experience and their vitality. These links were to prompt further thinking on my part about both leisure and vitality in later life.

I hoped to glean from their narrative of personal leisure histories valid criteria in identifying vitality. Though research has suggested significant relationships between satisfaction with personal leisure and life satisfaction, successful aging, subjective well-being, my purpose was to get into leisure involvement itself...to examine how people appearing to enjoy the 'life-good-to-live' experienced their leisure. It seemed important also to know their perceived involvement in the community and the extent to which they exhibited the positive mental health factors associated with high quality of life.

I believed the information generated about the meanings, values, and barriers experienced by active, vital elderly would be useful to educators, leisure counsellors, gerontologists, and community programme personnel. Knowing more about these factors could help one plan, promote, and conduct services that fit the value orientations and leisure portfolios leading to the positive vitality shown by active older people. One might better understand also the values and value changes that enhance the lives of active elders and help reduce the barriers that affect their participation.

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Conceptual and definitional difficulties with the phrases "well-being", "successful aging", "wel-lderly" led me to consider the term vitality. Vitality seemed less strapped to economic priviledge, more open to idiosynchracy. Vitality implied to varying degrees high levels energy and hope, personal growth, involvement in life, a regard for change with eagerness or equanimity, a positive self-regard, and an ability to cope despite possible health problems and personal losses.

My study was, and still is, in partial fulfilment of a graduate degree from The Ohio State University School of HPER, Sport and Leisure Studies Section. Thirty women and men from the metropolitan area of the city of Columbus consented to participate as subjects. They included white men and women, and women of colour aged 62 to 88 from lower to middle-upper income neighbourhoods. Just over 1/3 of the group was married. Among them were 7 men and 4 women. Among the others were 1 woman having never married, 2 widowers, 8 widows, and 6 divorcees. My interest in the perceived connections between leisure and vitality led me to these people through the public senior recreation system. Three senior recreation centres were approached after permission to approach them was received from the Ohio Agency on Aging. Vital, involved active people were identified at each centre by Centre Directors. Certain caution was taken to identify both men and women from "young-old and old-old" members.

Of those identified as vital after initial introductions we agreed to meet at a mutually convenient time for an exchange of information. Our meetings usually took place in a private area at the centre provided by the Director. Our first meeting provided an opportunity to get acquainted. I described the nature of the research, and their role in it, and they provided a general vitality profile. Profiles were sketched from a questionnaire I designed to assess their current community involvement, recreational pastimes, and

self-regard. A second interview was requested of individuals expressing relatively vital selves... i.e.those appearing on this profile to possess the characteristics of vitality mentioned earlier.

In our second interview participants were asked to provide further information on their personal orientation to various values and behaviours. For an objective comprehensive measure of values and behaviour orientation the POD - Personal Orientation Dimensions - by Knapp and Shostrom was used. The POD, an essentially non-threatening and self administered inventory of 260 items embodies the concepts of health suggested in humanistic psychology...in the theses on human growth by Jung, Rogers, Maslow, and others. The POD is seen as a comprehensive measure of values and behaviour believed important to actualizing, or growth, and positive mental health.

The analysis of their POD score was interesting. The most encouraging overall finding was that on the POD scales believed unaffected by cohort no statistically significant differences between this group and a separately identified high actualizing college-age group were shown. My group actualizing profile was in fact quite revealing in light of what many still believe about the paths of personal competency over time. These Columbus seniors appeared to score higher than the norm on the POD Strength scale. The POD strength scale is designed to measure the capacity to express a personal sense of power, worth, security, and competency...to reveal by word and action a pride and satisfaction in who we are, what we can do. Other scale scores as indicators of the actualizing qualities in these indivduals suggest the group expressed a capacity to live in the present rather than to blame one's past or depend on ones future. This preference for the present came out in numerous places on various issues in subsequent interviewing. They also expressed a capacity to see opposites as complementary, and an ability to view the nature of humanity as trustworthy and essentially good.

The purpose of our third meeting was to discuss their current, past, and anticipated involvement in leisure opportunities and recreational activity. This 'unfolding' of a personal leisure history and our talking about aging, vitality, barriers to participation in meaningful leisure, significant events and important people were recorded on cassette and video tape. To date the cassette tapes have been fully transcribed.

The recollection of their "playful past" was thoughtful. Many were helpful in guiding me to clarify questions, define terms. Most laughed or chuckled, plainly having a good time remembering their leisure involvement over the life course. Several cried. At times they took a moment to reflect before speaking. On other occasions the reponse was eager and spontaneous. Each in their own way opened to me selected doors and windows to their lives, their living and their leisure.

So...what was said? What were these people saying about their leisure over the life course? about events and people having an impact on their leisure opportunites? and about the links between leisure and aging, leisure and vitality?

In recollecting upon a childhood in the earlier years of this century many recalled with pleasure a more natural time. Their playgrounds were the nearby hills and fields, woods, streets, back alleys, and empty lots. As rural children some recalled aside from chores and a physical isolation from neighbours many an afternoon swimming, or fishing, or hiking the local countryside with notebook and sandwich in hand. With farm animals and pets for playmates they climbed tress, wrestled in the barn, skated in winter, read "Girls of Limberlost" and "Black Beauty", kept diaries, hand sewed, and belonged to the 4-H.

City children roller skated, jumped rope in the street, went to the movies for a dime and for the chocolate soldiers they could buy there. They played stickball and jacks, marbles, tag and hide 'n go seek. They rode bicycles and "belly busted" when enough snow had fallen.

In retrospect many remember their parents but especially father as influental. Fathers took sons and daughters hiking, fishing, and sleigh riding. He read to them, played their childhood games, taught them about the garden, the encyclopedia, the use of a hammer and nail. Mother was often over the washboard or in the kitchen canning and baking too busy to take respite with her family.

As Depression children, as kids before the era of toy technology many recalled making their own playthings...soap box cars, "street" cars, baseball bats, fishing poles, rope swings, dolls, and doll clothing. Their childhoods included good measures of family, school, and church activity. Picnics were popular family outings on Sunday afternoons and the whole family would listen around the radio to Jack Benny, or jazz music or the baseball games. Church was a meeting place with neighbouring children especially in rural area and schools provided them their initial instruction in sport skills, singing, drama, and dance.

As youths, the men lettered in football, basketball and track. The women were active in basketball - their rules of course - and in intramurals. Glee clubs, language clubs, drama and debating were popular and Scouts, Camp Fire Girls, and "Y"s provided many as teens the opportunities for summer camp. Several were to leave school because of family needs and others worked part-time after school and on weekends. Others enlisted in the military or began full time work right after high school graduation. Before the age of 20 in fact, most were in some way fully occupied working inside or outside the home.

In recalling their own mid-life leisure these Ohioans remember various forces then at play also with personal and family recreation. Widespread

economic recession in the '30s permitted little money to be spent on popular amusements, gifts, or travel. Some families even separated if only temporarily in search of employment and improved standards of living. Yet people picnicked, fished, swam, skated, cycled, celebrated national holidays with neighbours, supported favourite baseball teams, played games and cards, danced, sewed, and gardened much as they had in prosperity.

These Ohioans also recalled how, during World War II family camping and holiday trips declined. Gas rationing, travel authorization, and again, the separtion of spouses and of parents from children due to military service or work in factories and protected industries changed many recreation patterns. Metal was not available for children's toys or sporting equipment and service people at home and overseas found limited opportunity for tennis, music or the arts. In retrospect veterans recall off duty time spent reading, playing euchre, swimming, dancing, shooting pool, people watching, and visiting the local countrysid. Men and Women "State-side" recalled backyard victory gardens, community canning centres, and involvement as volunteers in youth organizations.

After the war their mid-life leisure patterns stayed with tradition. Women sewed and cooked as much for their own satisfaction as for their families, finding it necessary to plan personal recreation - bridge groups, tennis games, reading, and Women's League - around the school and work schedules of other family members. Men, restricted in similar ways found less time, energy, and money available for the range of sports, hobbies, and social groups they once enjoyed. Families spent summer holidays camping and travelling to places of interest within and beyond state boundaries. Sundays were still set aside for church. During the school year mothers especially, but fathers too, were involved as leaders in scouting groups, sports teams, and local PTAs.

Single career people then in mid-life socialized with co-workers, involved themselves in work-related projects, continued their education, and where

possible, retained close ties with parents and siblings. Some men and many women began caring for ailing parents. A number of women divorced or widowed. Those finding the transition difficult described recreation, friends, and involvement in the interest of their children as having eased the change to gainful employment outside the home and to single parenthood.

They valued their leisure in mid-life for other reasons. They learned by listening to the radio, reading magazines, studying the Bible, and gazing at the stars. Family traditions were upheld over Christmas, Hanukkah, and Thanksgiving, and illness passed quickly with a crochet hook and a detective novel. One explored one's natural heritage camping, fishing, and hiking. One discovered American history by visiting historic landmarks and reading in discussion groups. Recalled enthusiastically was the pleasure of playing sports to win and the joy of choral singing, dancing, reading poetry, and listening to jazz. It challenged one to upgrade a high school diploma, collect new recipes, learn a different language, prepare gourmet food, and teach Sunday school.

In sum, active older Ohioans recall the leisure of their middle years with satisfaction. They met good people, kept active - if not sightly overwhelmed with family needs, helped others less fortunate and every so often took a moment in more private pastimes to enjoy themselves, their families, and friends.

As vital adults today their breadth and depth of leisure experience is substantial. Though discrepancies in the leisure experience of men and women from different socioeconomic groups can be detected...discrepancies I'll address in a moment...the majority are involved in some form or another of physical, social, and/or self-improvement leisure opportunities. They exercise, walk, garden, dance, golf, bowl, play tennis, swim, maintain their homes, fish, cycle, hike, collect recipes, antiques, coins, and stamps, shop, eat out, play cards, entertain, picnic, attend sporting events, discussion groups, book reviews, travelogues, volunteer, sculpt, paint, read, sew, do calligraphy, genealogy,

needlepoint, ceramics, woodworking, caning, and travel by tour group and camper with family and friends from the Pacific North West to Florida, from Egypt to the U.S.S.R.

They also describe themselves as people who regularly vote, take an active interest in most state and federal issues, subscribe to at least one newspaper or magazine, listen to radio news, watch television, take in the occasional movie or play, visit local parks and libraries, attend church, and maintain strong ties with at least one friend or family member by visiting, calling, or writing regularly.

On a more personal note they see themselves as continuing to learn, able to find humour in some of things that happen in their lives, and see personal change as part of a natural process. It is important to them to maintain a good appearance and a clean home. They receive routine medical and dental checkups, practice good nutrition, and find it worthwhile to change their pace. They accept responsibility for their achievements and losses, preferring to solve their own problems and see themselves as friendly, alert, active, and involved.

DISCUSSION:

Hoping at the study's outset for insight to the perceived themes between leisure and vitality in later life I looked for the reported similarities and differences in the leisure experiences of selected subgroups. I hoped to understand better the various value orientations and leisure portfolios leading to the vitality shown by active older people of different backgrounds.

My first approach has been to separate the 30 into 5 relatively vital subgroups. The value orientations and liesure portfolios of those expressing the highest and lowest levels of vitality ie. levels of expressed community involvement, current recreationazl activity patterns, and positive mental health relative to the vitality and POD scores of the group were analyzed.

Interestingly, the similarities in the leisure portfolios and value

orientation of these 2 sub-groupings seem the larger study.

In their philosophies of living, thoughts on vitality, and in the links perceived between leisure and vitality there are compelling similarities, also. From the living ethos of the two groups:

> Its never too late. One needs to be involved... in interests outside the home, with other people, in activity that means something personally.

> Have something to do all the time and don't think in turns of getting "old". If you want to live as long as you possibly can each birthday makes you a year older. But, you can change without regrets and grow older gracefully if you make up your mind that's the way its going to be.

They caution:
Don't dwell on the negative--what's the good of it? Life takes many unexpected turns.

They advise:
Do all you can, today, now as well as you are able. You've wasted a part of the day when you don't.

Learn to deal with life...its bitterness and sweet. Enjoy what you've got, there's no use fighting. You can have a good life or a miserable one. Its up to you...in the final analysis its up to you.

Live for today. Tomorrow can take care of itself.

They suggest:
Accept your limits, plan, and do for yourself as long as possible.

To thine self be true and seek truth always, everywhere.

Help the Lord help ourselves and others.

Be satisfied with everything you do. Otherwise you'll not reach anything in life. Try your best in every way--then you'll have your joy from it.

And from their collective voice and on vitality and its link with leisure:

Vitality is created through comradery and contact with other, faith, life long involvement in meaningful activity, a living for the present good physical health, and the willingness to try. To this end leisure lets you know your

worth and keeps you interested in yourself and others. It is a necessary part of living, helping in adjustments to life events that bring about significant change. Leisure makes one happy, satisfied, "alive".

Leisure provides the opportunity to meet others and exert our independence. Leisure keeps the body moving, the hands busy, and the mind off your troubles. It soothes, fills in the empty spaces, and gives you a way to cope with boredom. It means alot to have something you really enjoy doing.

While . similarities in values, beliefs, opinions and leisure histories were evident of those expressisng relatively higher and lower levels of vitality, these 2 groups were not without their differences.

The higher vitality group characteristically rated themselves as more involved in community life, having greater positive attitudes towards themselves and others, and participated in a wider variety of current leisure activity. They had also been involved in a greater number and different kind of life long leisure interests.

The higher vitality group reported a life long involvement in twice as many interests as the lower vitality group, citing reading and learning first, followed by church involvement, crafts and hobbies, and exercise and physical activity. Those expressing lower vitality levels reported on the average a life long involvement in 2 activities, with combinations of interests in church work, volunteerism, out-of-doors interests, crafts and hobbies, and music appreciation. It seemed people expressing higher levels of vitality had more numerous but narrow life-long leisure patterns. They also appeared to prefer self-improvement over social or service opportunities. Those expressing lower levels of vitality, while broader in their life long leisure patterns were less active life long overall.

On leisure values the group diverged even more. Those expressing lower levels of vitality made fewer value statements concerning personal leisure

involvement and appeared to find meaning in their leisure for different reasons. They found their leisure valuable primarily because it put them into contact with others. The higher vitality group reported leisure's value in terms of opportunities to learn, create, begin projects, "do" something, and have fun. People expressing higher vitality also tended to see their leisure fully integrated in their lifestyle as an essential part of daily living.

CONCLUSION

Given the similar and variant themes between leisure vitality in later life expressed by these 2 small groupings of active senior Ohioans we who work to expand the leisure concept, the leisure experience in the field, in the classroom, in research among healthy, active adults might go forward in 3 directions.

First we might move toward further analysis of the leisure experience over the life course through phenomenological or ethnographic research designs. We might make better use of our listening and looking skills. In addition to the depth and context one expects in case study approaches to human behaviour, we may be lead to uncovering greater areas of interface, of similarity in experience and attitudes toward personal leisure over time. It has been suggested that as the more things change, the more they remain the same. While this may not be true of personal leisure histories the possibility that a greater appreciation of interfacing, of similarities through in-depth interviewing might occur behooves us to think longitudinally, to look for common space between the lines. Our questions are improved, our learning is enhanced, and our effort to deliver services to those who have had a life time of valuing leisure involvement is heightened.

Second, we might consider in a new way the merit of a values-based foundation to programme planning for well-being. Vitality in later life viewed in a leisure context seems to elude to some degree the expected effects of

normative age and history graded variables. Vital peope today, having lived through world wars, economic depression, civil unrest, rural electrification, and Viet Nam, regardless of age, sex, marital status, socioeconomic status express the links between personal well-being in later life, and leisure in similar ways.

If we consider their insights as links between leisure and vitality we get closer to understanding leisure as a life force, as access to the experiences, networks, and strategies of daily living deemed essential to vi tality in later life. Interestingly the etymology of the word "link" even fits. Link dates back to the days when a torch was used by people to guide their way through the street... Links were the hand held lights that placed both pathway and darkness in high relief as one went about one's business at the end of the day.

This notion of leisure as access to vitality brings me to point three. Robert Frost has written in his poem "The Road Not Taken"...

"Two roads diverged in a wood, and I -
I took the one less travelled by,
And that has made all the difference.

I think he might be saying two things about access.

Of the road not taken? of moving in one direction by virtue of not moving in the other? In the leisure histories and reminiscence of these 30 Ohioans I sensed a similar ambivalence, (and claim it for life long involvement in choosing, in initiating one's personal project through leisure opportunities) toward other roads, passed chances, alternate life styles, missed opportunities. Leisure as access leads <u>away from</u> as much as it leads toward the realization of personal capabilities. Meaningful involvement in leisure however permits regret

without despair, acceptance without resignation,...an affinity for synergy. Can we say the same of other routes to vitality?

And of the road taken?

Regardless of what appears shared in the lives, and leisure histories, and ethos of active men and women in their 60s, 70s, and 80s their interface is a surface of separation also. Common boundaries by definition recognize the independent within the interdependent, give substance to that which is not shared. Vital people like Frost, knowing in retrospect their good forturne have taken roads less travelled. They have chosen leisure in their lives and now know the good value, the happiness in their choices.